
HUMANSTUCK ZONE

Credits

Mods

Reva
 @reva_pocalypse

p17 AnxiousAdvent
 @anxiousAdvent

Creators

p2 Captain Moonstone
 @admiralexclipse

p18- Jonaya Riley
30  @AltUniverseWash

p3 Loop
 @vrissy_lalonde

p31 Carrot
 @carrot_arts

p4 Toadbait
 @toadbait

p32 Xenon
 @xenonymousj

p5 Rams
 @RamsZahhak

p33 Dave
 @denz.he

p6 Koji
 @athebler

p34 CapriciousJester
 @capriciousJestr

p7- Lily Strider
12  @curiouslyFrisky

p35- Mercedes
40  @turbovrgin

p13 Mars
 @LA1J3C

p41 Naibsel
 @naibselartz

p14 Kitkats
 @demonic.kitkats

p42 Jules
 @jules73777300

p15 Kitsune
 @k7sune

p43 Sarg/Unawks
 @unawks

p16 Fi
 @dirksimp

p44- Petrus
45  @Pedacindetorta









Rama

ホームスクッタ



Your name is KARKAT VANTAS and you really need to stop letting Aradia and Dave pick what you guys do. Going scuba diving in what the guide said 'probably' weren't shark-infested waters was one thing, but now, climbing down into a deep, dark, tight-ass hole in the ground with Jake goddamn English of all people is absolutely not your idea of a fun couples activity.

"Say Karkat, are you quite ready for this adventure?" Speak of the devil, Jake's talking to you. You look up at him and groan. Looks like he, Dave, and Aradia have finished setting up the necessary gear for the journey. Goddamn, you'd think from his outfit he's preparing to raid a damn tomb. You mean that last part literally, he looks like he came cosplaying Lara Croft.

"Oh yeah of course, I can't wait to plunge myself into the filthy bowels of this shitstain of a planet." You reply, double-checking all your spelunking gear. You may absolutely loathe these kinds of activities, but you aren't going to die from recklessness.

"Oh come on, Karkat, this is gearing up to be a good time!" Aradia interjects, and if Jake looks like Lara Croft, she looks like Indiana Jones, leather jacket and fedora and all, which frankly shouldn't surprise you.

"Yeah, dude, geez, we haven't even started diving head-first into the bosom of the earth and you're already in rant mode." Dave can also kiss your ass right now, why is he so damn hot in climbing gear.

"Well I'm fucking sorry, Dave, that flinging myself to the whims of the universe isn't making me want to break out into song and dance." You walk over to the hole and peer in. It's maybe twice your size, not quite as tight as you initially thought, but it's a good thing you aren't really claustrophobic.

"That's a shame, I'd love to hear you sing sometime!" Jake adds, already hooking himself to the belay system and preparing to descend. He's going first, you suppose. You just try not to say anything too rude before the two of you are stuck together for god-knows-how-long.

"Yeah man, how come Terezi's the only person who's gotten to hear you sing?" Dave asks as he begins hooking himself in. Once Jake was properly clipped in, he descended the whole-ass hundred foot drop to the cave surface in a frankly stupid time.

"Because she was listening to me while I was in the shower, Dave. Do you seriously think I'd willingly give her even more bullshit to blackmail me with?"

"I dunno dude, it kinda seems like you like giving people shit to mock you for." And with that, he starts the plunge as well.

Aradia is the last to clip in before you, and she grins up at you as she stands, legs practically parallel with the lip of the cave, the only thing between her and a very fast descent the cable grab holding her to the rope. "Well I'm sure if you ever do it'll be a great. . .time."

Fucking of course the last thing she says is a time pun. You don't even know why she likes them so much. Whatever. Soon enough it's your turn to descend, and you're almost thankful for it so Dave doesn't see what definitely isn't fear from you. It's not even the descent itself that scares you, just that moment when you have to give up the ground's comforting support and put all your weight on the ropes, praying you don't immediately fall to one of the more pathetic deaths you've imagined. You don't die. At least, not like that. After a moment of deliberation, you lean back into your harness and start descending into the cave. You only ever went into a cave before once, and that was a touristy waste of time. This is so much fucking darker. Also, fun fact, there are no walls anywhere near you once you enter the hole, so it feels a shit-ton like dropping into the void.

You do eventually hit ground, and Dave and Aradia are there to greet you, and several meters away you see the headlamp of Jake's helmet flicking around looking the cave up and down.

"You good, dude?" Dave asks, and it's probably genuine. You say probably because you can't see his damn face when his light's on.

"Why the shit-licking fuck are you still wearing your damn sunglasses."

"I dunno, why are you still. . .crabby."

"Dave I will push you down the first shaft we find." Before you can even finish the sentence you can practically feel Aradia making that o_o face.

"Wow Karkat I think right now might not be the best *time* to be thinking about shafts." She adds, and with that, you huff off to find Jake and continue into the cave. You take three steps before the ground gives out under you and you're plummeting. Shit.

"Oh shit Karkat!" Is the last thing you hear before you hit ground and feel your body move in ways it definitely shouldn't.

"Shit, Dave, get the ropes! Jake, you've got the first aid kit right?!" You hear Aradia distantly shout, but you can barely hear her over the blood pumping in your ears. You don't get long to attempt making peace with the asshole that is life before Aradia is descending next to you.

"Karkat? Karkat can you hear me?" She looks more concerned than you've seen her before. That's probably not good. "Karkat, your leg looks pretty broken, I'm gonna have to set it back in place, alright?" You nod weakly. Behind her, you catch Jake and Dave come down as well. You're not sure of this, but Dave looks scared.

In this moment of distraction, you feel a pain so sharp and sudden you can't help but cry out and pain. It fucking feels like Aradia is pushing something back into your leg. You try to look up and see what it is, but it's too gross to describe here. Needless to say, it doesn't make you feel better. Thankfully, it's over shortly, and you hear a tearing sound following by something being wrapped around your leg. It takes a while before you can breath again.

"Ok dude, this is gonna suck major ass, but we gotta get you to your feet. We don't know where the hell we are and for all we know there could skinny white murder people down here."

"Say, Dave, I don't pretend to be an expert on the subject of Mr Vantas, but I don't think that's helping."

"No, please, keep going while I fucking die." You manage to get out. "Now help me up before I just let my soul finally pass from one shitty place to another."

Turns out, getting up with a broken leg hurts more than this medical bill probably will. It takes an act of will stronger than watching Love, Actually quietly to not scream again as Dave and Jake help you to your feet. When you do get to your feet, you finally take in your new surroundings. Above you by maybe fifteen or twenty feet is an opening into the cave proper, and in front of you. . .

"What the fuck."

"What's the prob. . .lem." Everyone actually looks ahead in the cave and it's only now that it registers that, for some fucking reason, there are torches lining either side of a wide corridor that stretches out in front of you.

"Aradia, ol' chum, you were the one that studied the cave for our spelunking expedition, yes?"

"Uh, yeah, I was."

"I don't suppose that, perhaps, it mentioned anything about this?"

"Oh wait, yeah I remember! It was right under safety information, 'warning: mysterious paths hidden behind false floors.'"

"Ah good, as long as it was on the website."

"Alright, if we're done with hilarious jokes, are we gonna keep going?" You interject.

"Are you sure you wanna keep going? I mean, who knows what there could be that way. Could be really convoluted puzzles that'll test the limits of our friendship."

“Dave, we’re already here, you wanted a fucking adventure, here it fucking is.”

“That’s the spirit!” Jake adds.

And so the four of you begin walking down the weird-ass corridor. It seems to go for ages, just the four of you and the echoes of your footsteps to keep you company. Eventually, the corridor opens out into a massive square room, lit by more torches. As you step into the room, you notice artwork chiseled into the walls on either side, depicting rituals you can only begin to guess at the nature of. What all your eyes are drawn to, however, is a rectangular box on the far end of the room that looks disconcertingly like a tomb. You all approach it with great trepidation. When you get close enough to touch the thing, you can now confirm it is in fact a tomb with extremely ornate carvings vaguely reminiscent of something you’d see from Egypt.

“Should we open it?” Dave is the first to break the silence.

“Oh gee, Dave, I dunno, that sounds like a great idea. We should totally open the random-ass tomb in the middle of a cave!”

“Oh c’mon, Karkat, we already came all this way, we can’t not open it now.” Aradia counters.

“Yeah Karkat, wasn’t it your idea to keep coming this way in the first place?” Jake asks. Fuck Jake.

“Shut the fuck up, English, I didn’t expect to find a goddamn tomb for some random-ass dude down here.”

“I dunno man, this seems like the perfect place to decompose.” Dave readjusts his hold on Karkat.

“Alright!” Aradia claps her hands. “Guys, we came all the way down here, what sort of adventurers would we be if we don’t open it?”

“Ones who aren’t potentially desecrating property we could get arrested for?” You so don’t wanna get arrested with Jake. Fucking. English.

“Precisely! Boring ones!” Jake comments, of course.

Aradia grins and begins to slide the lid of the tomb. The grating of stone on stone fills the chamber as she pushes it off. It hits the ground with a near-deafening thud. All four of you stare down at what’s under the lid in silence for more than a second.

“Oh what the absolute fuck.”

"Why are there rocks in this dude's eye-sockets?" Dave asks.

"Well, Strider, it may be difficult to tell with those charming shades on, but those aren't rocks." Jake scratches his neck with his free hand.

Dave actually pushes his glasses up into his hair to properly see. In the tomb is a skeleton. Shocker. What is weird though is the skeleton has a massive, neon green overcoat on and massive black sapphires laid in their eyes.

"Ok, who's gonna touch them."

"Dave, I realize that years of wearing those stupid sunglasses has slowly sapped away whatever braincells you might've had, but i really hoped you weren't so far gone as to suggest ACTUAL GRAVEROBBING."

"C'mon man nobody even knows this exists it doesn't count."

"Those also look rather valuable, and I don't imagine that leg will be cheap to heal." Jake needs to stop countering your points you swear to god.

"I cannot believe you two actually want to fucking take gemstones from a corpse we found in a goddamn cave!"

While the three of you bicker, Aradia. Just fucking. Takes the gems. Of course the chamber immediately starts rumbling.

"What the *fuck*, Aradia!?" Of course it was booby-trapped. Why not. Did you piss in life's cup or something?

A massive chunk of the ceiling falls not a couple meters behind you. Then another. Before any of you know it, the entire chamber is starting to collapse.

"Welp, it's almost impressive how much stupider this is than any idea I had for how I'd die."

Just as it seems the whole goddamn cave is collapsing (which it kinda is), a small slab of rock slides open in front of you, and you swear you can see light at the end of the passage behind it.

"Everybody run!" Jake fucking picks you up bridal style and starts booking it, Aradia and Dave right in front of you. Even though an exit appeared, the cave is still falling apart around you, and you can almost feel the rocks at your heels. After a few moments of running, you can see the passage leads out into a wooded area. But the passage is still kinda collapsing, and it's seriously getting bad. Aradia and Dave barely make it out around falling rocks, and look back at you worriedly. As you get to the end, suddenly you're in the air and shortly tumbling to the

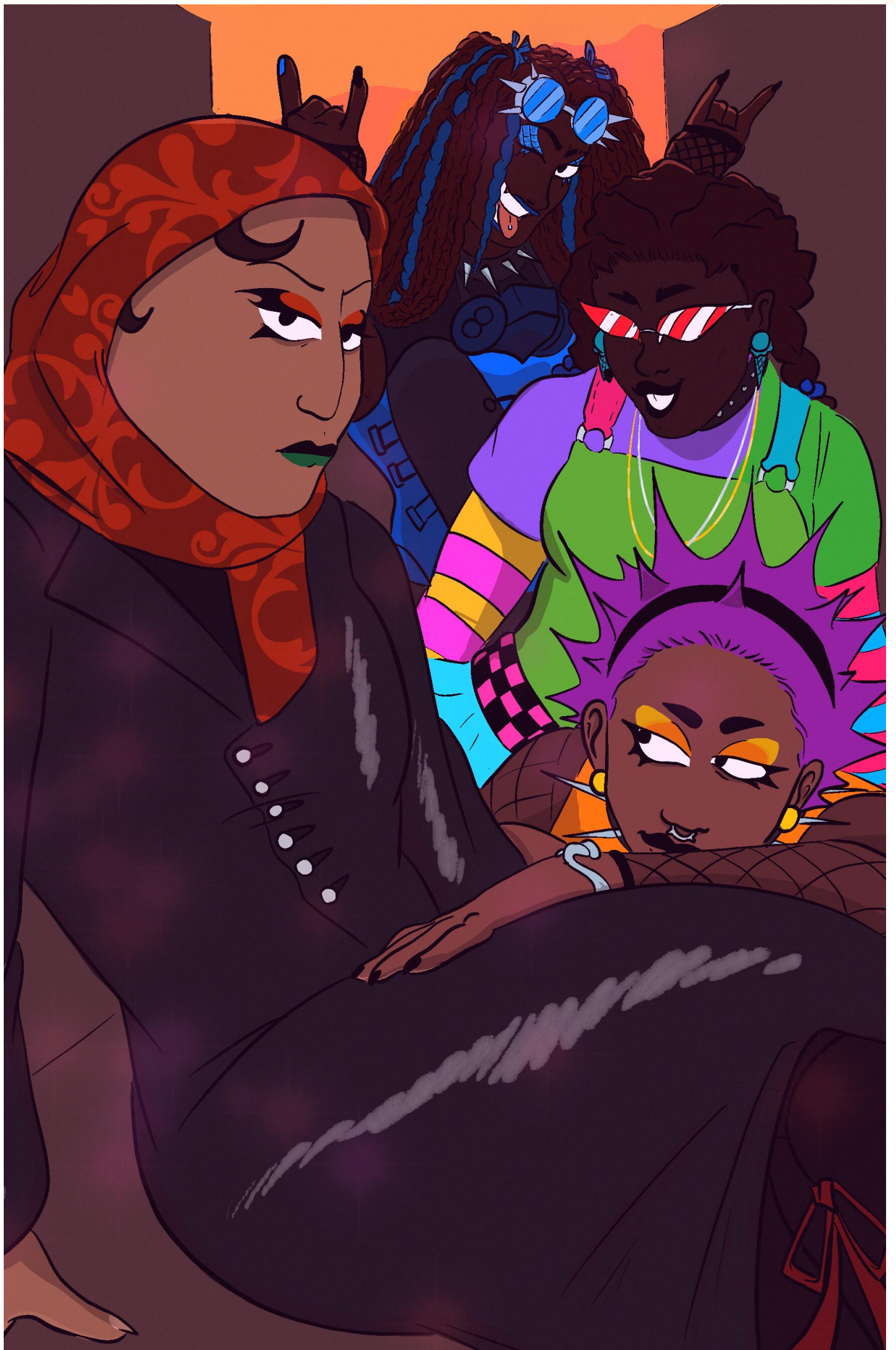
ground outside. Jake fucking threw you. As you lay panting on the ground, your leg throbbing, you hear Aradia ask “Jake, are you ok?”

“Just chipper! Though I will admit I don’t think I’ll be looking for any high-risk scenarios anytime soon.” You kind of hear this while Dave crushes you in a hug.

“Dave, I appreciate the sentiment, but I can’t fucking breath.” You hit the ground with a soft thud when he just lets you go. Aradia looks over at the two of you and grins, walking over and crouching down.

“I told you today would be fun!” She kisses your cheek and springs up, wandering around to presumably figure out where the hell you guys are.

“Next time, we are watching a fucking movie and that’s it.”









arachnidsGrip: TEREZI!!!!!!
gallowsCallibrator: WH4TS WRONG?
(Summoned Ender Dragon)
gallowsCallibrator: OH Y34H, TH4T!
arachnidsGrip: TEREZI I SWEAR TO GOG!!!!!!
gallowsCallibrator: >D

M E O W



Her Garden of Small Miracles



of



Jonaya Riley
(AltUniverseWash)



twitter: @AltUniverseWash | AO3: AltUniverseWash

(1)

The woman was in the garden again, of course - it was her custom to read there every afternoon when the light grew dim enough to provide some comfort in the shade, yet not so dim as to obscure her vision. The scent of jasmine was heavy in the air and the shadows were growing long already. Soon, it would be night and she would linger a while before she finally retired for the evening, back into the villa on the hill where she made her home.

"How heavy do I journey on the way... when what I seek, my weary travel's end."

She paused and placed a long finger on the page of the book laid out in her graceful lap. Long, graceful fingers on long, graceful arms that led to a tall frame. Deep, olive skin and raven's wing-black hair that framed a face that belonged on one of Michaelangelo's old statues! Eyes that were always set with a look of determination. An aquiline nose that gave her an air of distinction.

Her name was Kanaya Maryam, and Aradia de Megido was in love with her.

"I can see you there, you know. Always at the edge of the garden - for a week now. Am I that fascinating? Or are you simply a fan of the Bard? I know he's a bit stuffy now, but I still appreciate the measure of his words."

Aradia swallowed hard, unsure of how to answer.

"Come now - sally forth and all that. What is it you're afraid of? I have no ill intention toward you."

She stepped forward, brushing aside the hedge she'd been half-concealed behind. Her face was flushed deep with embarrassment as she approached - she hadn't expected to be seen during her admittedly voyeuristic passtime.

"What is your name?" Kanaya asked, her voice pleasantly warm, but with a slight trace of a rasp to it.

"Aradia de Megido, Signora. And you are Lady Kanaya Maryam. My apologies - I was... passing by and couldn't help but overhear."

Kanaya laughed - it was a sound as delightful as anything Aradia had been expecting. "Lady?! Signorina, you flatter me too much. I tend this villa and its grounds only while my sisters and brothers are away." She closed the book in her lap.

"And you... you have come far for someone who speaks with such an accent."

Aradia stopped in her tracks and looked down - her skin was two shades darker than Kanaya's. Not wholly unusual in the southern region of Italy, but when combined with her accent it would give her away.

"You're right. I was born in Spain." Aradia felt herself relax a little. "I was... I traveled for a time north of here."

"Spain?" Kanaya asked. "Oh! You are a Moor, like Othello! Although..." her face fell a bit. "I would hope your story is less filled with heartbreak and tragedy."

Aradia shrugged. "Close enough. Othello fought with the Venetians... I did too, for a time." She smiled at Kanaya, who beamed back - and the garden seemed to light up in spite of the quickly encroaching shadows.

"Fought? You were a soldier? What was *that* like?" Kanaya was leaning forward, her book almost dropping to the ground.

But Aradia didn't want to answer her - she wanted to look away. And then she wanted to be anywhere else - anywhere but in this garden in the company of this beautiful woman she was smitten by.

"It was... difficult."

The horse was definitely dead - the rider, she was less sure about. He'd been groaning at first, trying desperately to stand in the thick mud that'd been churned up after the morning's rain. Then, after a while, he'd stopped groaning. The horse, on the other hand, had never been groaning. It had been sitting there, starting to smell in the midday sun.

Aradia sat behind it and clutched her musket tightly to her chest. She'd done her best to clean the mud off the flint, but she wasn't entirely sure it would go off. The mud tended to get into everything and even with the sun beating down and drying things off, it was still wet. Wet that seeped into powder and ensured that it would only fizzle out when she tried to get off that one, desperate shot.

Instead, she would play dead and hope to whatever terrible God still watched over them all that Her Imperious Condescension's forces wouldn't advance again. She could still hear them in the distance - the swell of a thousand-strong regiment marshalling at the end of the blood-soaked expanse known only as the Miller's Field. Aradia wasn't sure why it was called that. She wasn't sure why the thought was even in her head as she waited there, tucked down into the muddy expanse and waiting for death to find her.

One way or another, it would - the pain in her leg where the musket-ball had torn its price in flesh still ached. The mud wasn't helping - she'd tried her best to pack the wound with a strip torn from her uniform but it was barely adequate. At least she wasn't bleeding to death... whether or not that was a mercy remained to be seen.

It was a week now that she'd been coming to the garden, with its high walls on two sides and perfumed air that she increasingly associated with the woman who sat there and read in the evenings. Without truly intending it, they had begun to establish a semblance of a routine. Aradia would arrive as the sun began its passage through the door of golden splendour and into the world of shadow. In those last few golden rays, Kanaya would sit and read to her.

"I can lend you the book, if you would like. I assume that you are a woman of letters - you spoke with such familiarity of the play when we first met." Kanaya set her book down in her lap and smiled - Aradia looked away quickly so that this noble Italian lady couldn't see the ruddy swell quickly building in her cheeks.

"You're right... but I enjoy hearing you read aloud." Aradia's voice dropped as she spoke the next part - "Your voice is... pleasant."

Kanaya smiled at her, her own cheeks glowing slightly in the waning light of the afternoon sun. "You flatter me, oh Lady of Spain."

"Not so much... my parents fought for... they fought in the War of Occupation." She shifted where she sat next to Kanaya and looked away again. "They didn't want me joining the regiment, but... I did."

She felt something brush her forearm and looked down to see Kanaya's fingers touching her wrist. Her hands were soft - almost delicate - but they looked like they had strength in them. Aradia smiled at her and placed a hand over-top - her own fingers were considerably rougher, even two months clear of...

Even two months later.

"But you've not been fighting in any wars lately?" Kanaya's tone was hard to place - a strange combination of inquisitive and concerned. "The things happening in the north - up near Austria... we're safe here."

Aradia shrugged and tried a smile that felt more theatrical than genuine. "I have other skills. I was raised to read and write quite well, and I have no small degree of skill with a ledger. I assisted the regimental quartermaster and I provide my services to several of the merchants in town." She fell silent.

Kanaya leaned in toward her. "You prefer to live like this? I'm sure it's less adventurous - sometimes I wonder what it's like to be out there. Maybe... maybe I should've run off to join the Florentine Company or the Milanese - but it was such a long way and I had obligations here." She sighed and looked off.

Aradia sat back. "No... you wouldn't want that for yourself. I wouldn't... pay it no mind, Lady of Naples." The sound of the insects buzzing in the dwindling heat of the day was loud and heavy around her - she closed her eyes, letting the sound wash over and surround her.

The sound of insects buzzing in the sweltering heat of the day was loud and heavy around her. The mud was dried - caking to her skin and sticking to everything. She wasn't even sure if she could fire the musket if she needed to. They hadn't issued her a sword, but she had a long dagger for emergencies - it was still tucked securely into her belt. At least that was something. Aradia closed her eyes, letting the sound of the insects in the distance and the flies buzzing around the ripening horse carcass wash over her.

She couldn't hear the sound of the enemy regiment in the distance. Aside from the sounds of nature, it had been quiet for some time. Cautiously, Aradia shifted in the half-dry mud - her leg burned as she moved but she forced herself through the pain and rolled over. Peering up over the body of the horse, she scanned the horizon.

Gone were the enemy banners and troops. The only thing she saw were the dots in the mud where her former comrades-in-arms had fallen. The field was all churned mud now - no doubt mixed with a fair quantity of blood as well. She was trying not to think about it.

The pain was so bad - she knew that if she didn't get the wound cleaned out soon, it would fester and she would succumb to the wasting disease that so often claimed the lives of her fellow soldiers. But Aradia's constitution was stronger than that - she gritted her teeth and forced herself to standing, wobbling as she surveyed the charnel house that this unknown field had become.

She knew the names of so many of them - people she had stood with. Eaten with. Fought with. Two she had made love to.

Now all dead - fallen to the earth from whence they came.

Her mouth was dry and she had nothing in her for tears, but Aradia felt her heart breaking all the same. She stumbled back, using the musket to prop herself up. There was a village nearby that she could go and tend her wounds. She knew the innkeeper there. Aradia had eaten there the night before with some of the others - spending a better chunk of their pay than they intended in exchange for the chance to feel normal for a night. She'd drunk more than she meant to - almost been late for muster in the morning. She'd ended up further back on the line.

The front line had gone down all at once. Her original place...

She tried not to think about it.

"Do you realize that you have been coming to my garden for almost a month now?"

Kanaya asked her, setting the book down. It was growing too dark to read anymore, but they'd developed the habit of sitting and talking long after the Sun made its way below the horizon. It was still pleasant enough - the air warm and dry and the breeze quiet and gentle.

Kanaya's face was shadowed - there had been a pall over their conversation that whole evening and her voice had been listless while she read. Aradia sat next to her on a long stone bench in the garden - their usual spot in the last two weeks - and wondered what had happened.

"Lady of Spain... can I confide in you?" she asked, her voice barely audible even over the soft noises of the night. "Can I speak freely without you thinking ill of me?"

Aradia felt herself stiffen - her nerves immediately on edge even though she couldn't tell why. But still - she had no reason to think Kanaya was ill-intentioned. "Of course, Lady of Naples."

"Please... call me Kanaya," she whispered.

"Very well, Kanaya. You may call me Aradia if you wish."

"Okay... Aradia..." the flush in her face was visible even in the dim light of twilight.

"I have received some distressing information today... all my sisters and both brothers were killed near Austria a week ago. The rider just made their rounds with the news today. My parents died long ago..." She sighed and bowed her head. "In truth, I am the last Maryam left to tend this place."

"I am sorry." Aradia reached out and placed a hand on Kanaya's arm. The woman was crying, but it was so quiet Aradia could barely tell.

"The truth is... I do not... I do not know how to feel about this. I will miss them, and their death was tragic. But also... I never felt especially close to them and..." She took a deep breath, as if what she was going to say next required particular preparation. "I am free now. Truly free. No one will dispute my claim to this land or estate - there are no family heirs or next in line to take it from me." She smiled and sobbed at the same time.

"Do you think less of me now, Lady of- Aradia. Do you think me a miserable wretch who exists only to serve her own selfish gain?" Kanaya turned away and pulled her arm from Aradia's grasp.

She was clean now and her wound was tended. It ached, but it was shallower than she thought. She lay in the inn's bed and stared up at the ceiling. She'd nearly died out on that battlefield - lying in the stink of mud and foul water and decaying flesh. Everyone around her cut down, and she only spared through a happenstance of timing and fate.

But she was alive, in the end. And all she could think...

...was that she was free.

"No..." Aradia muttered, leaning toward Kanaya. "I don't think you a miserable wretch... or any sort of wretch. Rather charming, actually."

Kanaya fidgeted and clasped her hands in front of her knees, smoothing out her dress. "You are strange, Aradia. You speak plainly and you wear the rough clothes of a common worker, but you are capable of insight and gentleness that I would never have expected. I find you... quite charming as well."

It was strange to hear - because Aradia had spent so long denying that this was an experience she was allowed to have. "I'm sorry... I'm not used to this..."

"To what?" Kanaya reached over and grasped Aradia's hand. "To being called charming?"

Her face felt hot as she stammered out her response. "No... well, yes. But... to be soft. To be gentle. It feels very foreign at times. Even now... as if the war followed me even to this far-away land."

She shifted, leaning into Kanaya now. "I wonder sometimes if I'll ever go back to being the girl I was... before everything."

The voice that responded was close to her ear - Kanaya had turned to face her directly and her lips were inches away. "I do not believe that we can ever return to who we once were. I do not believe that is something we should seek." She leaned in. "Rather that we seek to live as who we have become... and who we want to be."

Aradia felt those lips brush close - the warm breath was tickling the hair at the base of her neck. And part of this was strange to her. Part of her felt like turning away and walking out - like giving into the vague sense that she didn't deserve to be comfortable and running away from all of this. But, in truth, that part of her had died on a battlefield north of Bolzano.

July 17th, 1721. That was the day she'd died... and been given a second chance to live.

She leaned in and a pair of soft lips kissed her neck, lingering for a moment and leaving the faintest tingling trace of sensation behind in their wake. Aradia dosed her eyes.

"I think I'm falling in love with you."

"That is a tragedy then, we've only just met." There was a playful edge to Kanaya's voice.

"We've known each other for a month now."

Aradia turned and opened her eyes to see Kanaya looking at her. Her eyes were a deep gray-green - the color of storm clouds at sunset. Aradia swallowed heavily - she didn't want to return to her room in town that night.

"You are correct. The time has gone by so quickly." She smiled. "I would very much like to continue to grow acquainted with you. Perhaps more intimately than before."

Aradia blushed. "You barely know me. Besides, I've... I'm not the hero from some Homeric epic. I can't sleep well - I dream about what I've done. I... I get up and pace in the small hours, disturbing everyone!"

She shrugged and her smile broadened. "That is fine - Odysseus was a scoundrel."

Aradia noticed that Kanaya's lips were now very close to her own. "I don't deserve to be happy, Kanaya."

But Kanaya didn't move back - didn't draw away from her with a look of disdain. Didn't tell her to go from this place and never return.

Instead, Kanaya kissed her.

And when it ended, Kanaya smiled at her. "I do not believe that to be the truth."

"I... have to return to my room for the night. It will grow dark soon." She was flushed and she didn't want to go, but there was no way this could possibly be real. After everything? It couldn't be happening.

"You are welcome to stay for the evening, if you wish. Or several days. Or indefinitely, if you wish. I have several guest chambers... as well as a comfortable bed of my own if you would prefer to avail yourself of that."

"That is very forward of you," Aradia muttered. She didn't want to admit out loud how strongly the suggestion appealed to her.

Kanaya shrugged and smiled at her. "And yet the offer remains open for as long as you want to consider it." She leaned in again and kissed Aradia on the cheek. "I have begun to harbor a strong affection for you, Lady of Spain."

All around, the sounds of the twilight hours pressed in - the soft buzz of the insects and the calls of the birds making their roost before darkness fell in totality. The scented breeze blew warm though her hair, whispering that she need not live bound to the past forever. There was, perhaps, life yet to be found here - so far from that grim field north of Bolzano.

"I am saying that I am falling in love with you as well, Aradia."

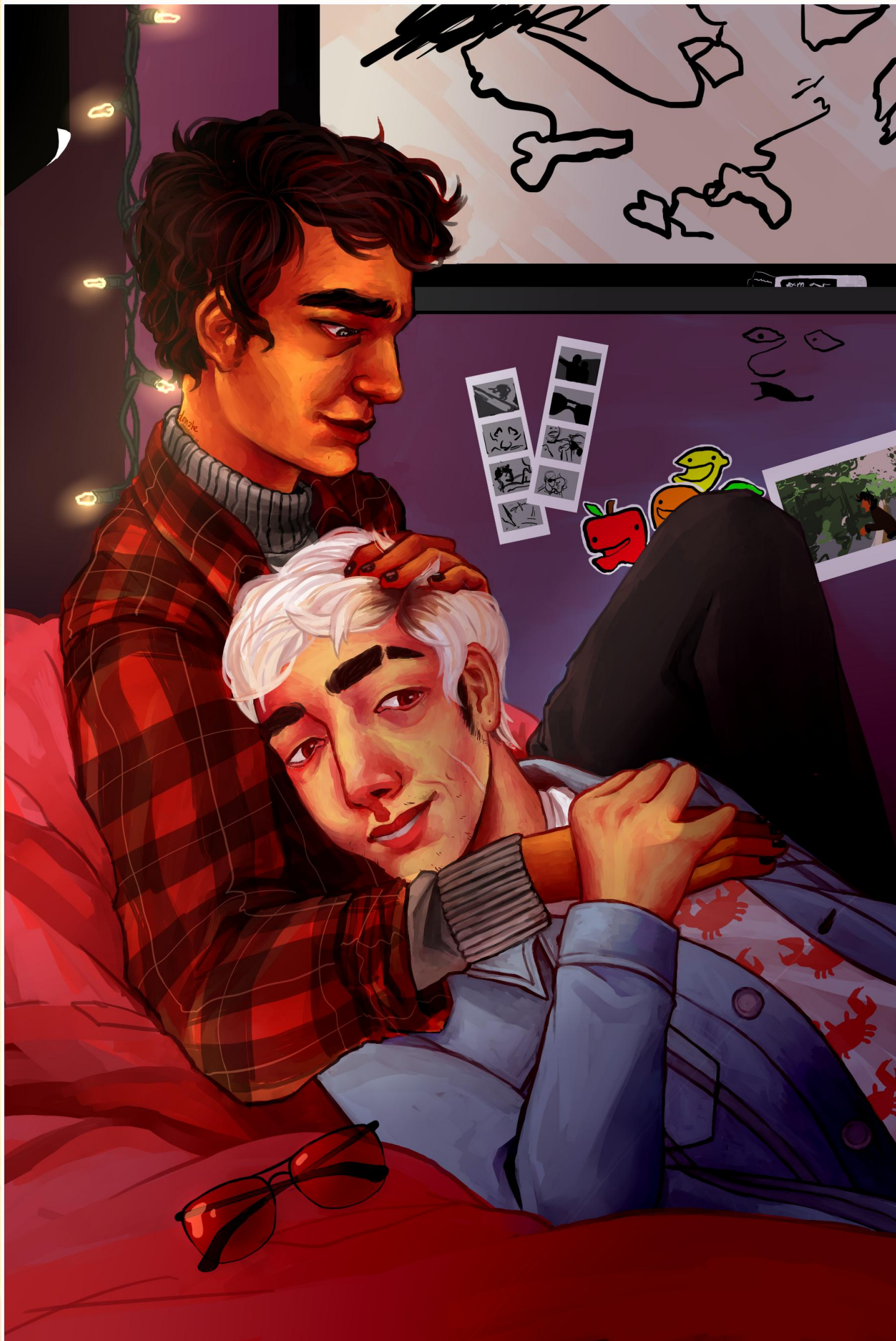
Aradia raised a hand and gently cupped Kanaya's chin, drawing her in closer. Once more, in that half-walled garden scented by the jasmine breeze, they kissed.

And for the first time in as long as she could remember, Aradia thought of nothing else.



Corrat







Me and Him and Us

Terezi: You know that you don't have to date him, right?

Jade: Yeah, but I don't wanna hurt his feelings, plus he's so much happier

Terezi: True, but maybe you should think about yourself & stop being a pushover

Jade: Ugh! It doesn't matter! Anytime I stand up for myself I become a big mean bitch! & maybe I want people to like me

Terezi: Yeah, I understand but have you considered going apeshit, just being an absolute bitch. All of your siblings are bitches & everyone loves them.

Jade: Hmph, I'm not like you or Vriska.

Terezi: Come on, we aren't even actually like that ourselves. Don't sweat it

Jade: Trust me. I won't.

Two "girls" walk to the Food Mart together and project on to each other. One "girl" is tall and thin and brown-skinned. Long dyed dreads heat their neck and bruised calves keep underskirts from dipping into the mud. Their grandpa used to tell them that when they were born, the doctors said that they would be tall, thin, gentle, and extremely intelligent. They don't know if they believe that, but they want to. When they are with their boyfriend, they are a Girl. They don't like it, but She does what She has to do.

Terezi: What happening in that big ol' brain of yours

Jade: Dave.

Terezi: Oh, ok. Good luck.

Jade: Sorry

Terezi grew up around tall, thin, and proud women, and has never been anything like them before. Xe is barely five-foot with dark skin and short coiling hair. A far cry from fae's sister and mother who are a deep tan with "the good hair". (What the fuck does that even mean?). Xe tries to pretend she is proud; xe has dated Dave, Karkat, Gamzee, and Vriska, lying to faeself about how proud fae is. Despite all xyr "pride", She believes that maybe fae cannot be a full-time liar with Jade.

Jade: Can you text June for me and ask if she wants anything, my phone is on 1%.

Terezi: Damn, you're just living like that?

Jade: Yeah

Eyes advert and faces flush. They are good friends and Jade knows that all Terezi wants is the best.

Junebug ;P: junie is drivin but she said she wants cola gummies & a vitamin water

- roxy

Junebug ;P: i'll pay you back for a vanilla coke & a hershey bar

- roxy

Junebug ;P: thxs!

Jade grabs a pink Monster and the family size bag of Cool Ranch Doritos, and Terezi gets a Mountain Dew and a pack of Sour Patch Kids.

Terezi: Hurry up and sit down!

Jade: Calm down! I'm wearing 3 underskirts, a slip, five bracelets, and 4-inch platforms, it's gonna take me a sec.

Terezi: You chose to wear that, and in 80-degree weather no less.

Jade: The cottagecore aesthetic doesn't stop for nothing!

Terezi: I hear ya!

Terzi is bold to talk while fae is wearing 3lbs worth of chains and beaded bracelets.

Terezi: It's the toxic masculinity for me.

Jade: It's the biphobia for me.

Terezi: It's the being built like a Muppet for me.

Jade: It's the flirting with my sister in front of me, while she is uncomfortable and dating his sibling for me.

Terezi: Jesus Fucking Christ! It's the individuality complex for me.

Jade: It's the denying his homoerotic relationship with K. for me.

Terezi: Doesn't that feel good.

Jade: Yeah. You're right.

Terezi: Thanks! I'm rarely ever wrong.

Jade: Do think I'll lose friends, or that people will hate me though.

Terezi: Everybody knows how insufferable Dave can get. We're 15 and y'all have been dating for 10 months, and honestly, it's amazing you made it that far. I don't know if it's because I get to watch from the outside or because it was really that bad, but I would've dropped out when he implied that he'd smash your sister but not you.

Jade: Yeah, I'm ace and all but that was still really fucked up.

The cicadas are always slightly too loud but do a better job of filling the silence than crickets.

Terezi: I like hanging out with you.

Jade: I like hanging out with you too! Can I be honest with you?

Terezi: Yeah of course

Jade: I like that I can be bitchy with you and that you like it. I think I might be able to fall in love with you.

Terezi: Wow, uh, thank you! I might be able to fall in love with you too. Do you want to?

Jade: Yeah.

It's oppressively hot outside, and they both wonder if it was always this hot.

Terezi: So, are we girlfriends or getting ready to be girlfriends or friends with mutual affection for each other?

Jade: I'll have to break up with Dave, first.

Terezi: Oh yeah.

Jade: But we can build it up & be close like Dave and K.

Terezi: Whatever you're comfortable with is amazing for me!

Jade: Thanks!

The muggy humidity is cut by a brisk wind and for a second the world is quiet.

Terezi: Eridan's brother believes that black people don't have to wear sunscreen because of melanin

Jade: Isn't he like 30?

Terezi: 28 to be exact

Jade: Huh, he's really just out there being grown AND wrong.

Terezi: Yeah. Oh! Have you seen Tula's new car!

Jade: Nah, is it nice?

Terezi: Yeah, it's this red convertible from the 70s and it has an ashtray in it.

Jade: It sounds very Pyrope-y

Terezi: Yeah it is. I'm gonna call her to pick up.

Jade: Oh! Thanks

The 15 minutes it takes Latula to get to the convenience store passes in silence, but the sound of cicadas keep conversations going and the infrequent relief of brisk winds.

Latula: Hey theydies!

Jade: Hi!

Terezi: Heyyy!

Latula: Did you see the tiktok I sent you?

Terezi: The 'You have to stop flirting with your boyfriend's dad' one?

Latula: Yeah, tell me why Meulin sent me that

Terezi: Probably because you keep trying to get with her aunt

Jade: With all due respect, didn't you just get eloped.

Latula: Yeah, but he finds the creative ways that I flirt with Porrim and the ways they reject me funny.

Jade: Oh cool!

Latula: So, what's the teenager gossip, today?

Jade: I'm breaking up with Dave, and I'm gonna pursue a relationship with Terezi

Terezi: And June and Roxy are dating.

Jade: Oh yeah! June even has joint custody over the cats. She gets them on the weekends.

Latula: Awww! Puppy love! Congrats to you, your sister, and you too, TZ!

The Pyrope family house stands tall and proud just like the matriarch, Latula, and hopefully one day, Terezi. Lying in the middle of the overgrown lawn are two lawn chairs for two brown skin kids learning how to stop lying to themselves.

As the sun goes down crickets start to fill the silence.

